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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **e-Accessibility for Modern and Inclusive Schools**

Today, the USAID Equal Access for Equal Opportunities project held the conference “For e-Accessible Primary Schools: Assistive Technology in Primary Education in Macedonia.” The conference brought together representatives of national and local educational authorities, disability-focused NGOs, as well as numerous practitioners: school directors, teachers, parents, and students with first-hand experience in using assistive technology in school. Participants agreed that assistive technology, such as big-button keyboards, trackballs and joysticks, widens the educational opportunities for students with disabilities and proposed concrete measures for its systematic introduction in the education system.

“A modern and inclusive educational system prepares *all* persons, including those with disabilities, to be active and contributing citizens of their community,” said Robert Wuertz, USAID Mission Macedonia. “I am proud that USAID has supported pioneering steps to introduce assistive technology in mainstream education in Macedonia.”

Natasha Janevska, State Advisor from the Ministry of Education and Science stressed the government’s commitment to improving the inclusiveness of the educational system. “The experiences of schools already using assistive technology as a result of this innovative project will help us shape the model of future primary schools: inclusive and based on wide use of IT in instruction,” she said.

USAID’s Equal Access for Equal Opportunities project will publish the conclusions and recommendations from the conference by the end of April. The project, implemented by the Open the Windows association from Skopje, works to improve the inclusiveness of the education system for *all* children and to modernize the education system by introducing assistive information technology in the everyday instructional process. A total of 21 primary schools were equipped and their staffs trained in using assistive technology for instruction.

#### NOTE TO EDITORS:

The Open the Windows association is dedicated to promoting access to information technology for individuals with disabilities, enabling them to fully utilize their abilities. For details, please visit: ([www.openthewindows.org](http://www.openthewindows.org)). USAID is proud to partner with Open the Windows. Worldwide, USAID is increasing funding to local organizations to build their capacity and ensure their sustainability over the long term. USAID Macedonia has, in fact, increased the amount going to Macedonian NGOs from \$700,000 in fiscal year 2010 to \$3.4 million in 2011. We plan to continue increasing this amount over the next few years.

The American people, through USAID, have invested over \$500 million in Macedonia since 1993. USAID is working with the people of Macedonia to create jobs, strengthen democratic institutions and practices, enhance integrated education, and prepare students for the workforce. These initiatives improve the quality of life and support Macedonia’s transition to a stable and prosperous democracy. USAID provides economic and humanitarian assistance in more than 100 countries. For more information please visit <http://macedonia.usaid.gov>.